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ABSTRACT

Part of a larger study of volunteerism, a consulting team of nine individuals worked in eight countries studying the words used to describe people who "volunteer." Consultants participating in the discussion represented Australia, Ecuador, the United States, Jamaica, Canada, Germany, Japan, and Spain. The goal of the overall study was to understand better the culture of volunteerism, to understand the motivations of volunteers, and to learn how to attract and retain volunteers to support volunteer programs. Edited exerpts from the taped discussion of the consultants (who came to call themselves the companeros) are reproduced. (DB)

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Volunteer Development Discussion Paper

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No. 3

BÉNÉVOLE, EHRENAMTLICHE, COMPAÑERO, PARTNER: DESCRIBING "VOLUNTEER" IN DIFFERENT CULTURES

A Roundtable Discussion with the AFS Volunteer Resources Study Research Team (the "Compañeros")

December 1988

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The AFS Center for the Study of Intercultural Learning

BÉNÉVOLE, EHRENAMTLICHE, COMPAÑERO, PARTNER: DESCRIBING "VOLUNTEER" IN DIFFERENT CULTURES

A Roundtable Discussion with the AFS Volunteer Resources Study Research Team (the "Companēros")

December 1988

As part of AFS's human resource development effort, The AFS Center for the Study of Intercultural Learning (AFS/CSIL) is conducting a study of volunteerism in eight countries. The goal of this study is to understand better the culture of volunteerism in general, to understand the motivations of volunteers, and to learn how AFS can better attract and retain volunteers to support its programs. Nine special consultants have been working in the eight countries.

Desmond Walsh, Australia
Ronald Rivera, Ecuador
Barry Chevannes, Jamaica
Donna Freeman, USA/Eastern
Jeanine Deen USA/Western
Kelly Thompson, Canada
Uli Zeutschel, Germany
Chieko Nabetani, Japan
Ana Maria Sousa, Spain

In November of 1987, the research team for the AFS Volunteer Resources Study met in New York with Neal Grove and Bettina Hansel of The AFS Center for the Study of Intercultural Learning. For four days, they participated in a training workshop to prepare them for the work they would be doing in their respective countries. As part of this workshop, each consultant came prepared to discuss the words used to describe people who "volunteer" in their countries (Jeanine Deen, consultant for USA/Western told the group about the terms used in her native Netherlands, although that country is not part of the study). In the course of this discussion, the team adapted the Latin American term "compañeros" to describe themselves as people who break bread together and work together.

In this paper, we have reproduced edited excerpts from the taped discussion of the compañeros.

New York City, 15 November 1987

Bettina Hansel (AFS/CSIL): AFS/U.S. sells a T-shirt with the word "volunteer" translated into several languages. I was curious about the French term for "volunteer," which the T-shirt shows to be "volontaire." When I was speaking with AFS people in Paris and in Montréal, I found out that neither our French Office nor our Canadian

Office uses that term, but rather "bénévole." In the course of visiting Mlle. Marguerit Levy of the Centre d'Etudes et d'Information sur le Volontariat [Center of Studies and Information on Volunteerism] in Paris, I asked her about this distinction. From her I learned that these terms are often used interchangeably, but the distinction still exists. "Volontaire" refers to people who could in fact work for pay but the primary point of their work is the cause; they are militant, or at least strongly committed to the cause for which they work. Any pay they might receive is small, and secondary in importance to their motivation for working. The "bénévole" is one who works without pay for an organization to which they may or may not feel strongly committed.

Kelly Thompson (Canada): Actually, in Canada the distinction isn't quite the same. "Voluntaire" is considered an anglicisme in Québec and thus is avoided in most literature. It carries the connotation of volunteering for the military service as opposed to being drafted, but this is a usage that comes from France rather than Canada. "Voluntaire" is associated with the French word "volunté" which is a noun meaning will. This might indicate why it is used in conjunction with political causes in France, but it is used in Canada to indicate a person who is working cooperatively on a project, with perhaps a technical bias. "Cooperant" is another word used in this sense, although this word is often used for people who go to a Third World country to do international development work, and they will often be paid -- perhaps a smaller sum that they would for similar work in Canada. Cooperants are assumed to have a strong commitment to a cause. "Bénévole" is used more for volunteer work in the social services and one does the work "de bonne grace." It is related to the word "benevolence" and can conjure up a patronizing picture of the women's bridge club making lace doilies to sell. In the last few years, "bénévolat" is developing a more general sense of volunteering in any context, and it really is the most appropriate term in French.

Uli Zeutschel (Germany): On the T-shirt that Bettina showed us, I noticed the word "Freiwilliger." Translated literally, it means "free-willed person," or someone who does something out of his or her own volition. Actually, as an individual noun that term evokes images of people committing heroic deeds under dramatic circumstances, such as offering themselves as hostages or going on a rescue mission. In our context, it is generally used as an adjective, as in "Freiwillige Feuerwehr," which is a standing expression for volunteer fire brigades in communities that are too small to have a full-time fire department. "Freiwillige Helfer" would be another general term for people who offer their services without pay -- more so in specific events than on a continuous basis within an organization. In that context the term "Ehrenamtliche" is more appropriate. It is made up of two words: "Ehre" meaning honor and "Amt" meaning office, function, or position. I think there's an interesting connotation here; "honorary position" sounds very rewarding and positive, though starkly in

contrast with the usual jokes about the appointment of volunteers: Those ready to volunteer are asked to take one step forward, so everybody immediately takes one step backwards and the person who forgets to do so is the volunteer. So in reality there doesn't seem to be as much honor involved as the term suggests, or the honor derived from the position is not perceived as a motivating factor.

In common usage, "ehrenamtlich" is also employed in the adjective form, mostly in combination with the word "Mitarbeiter," which in literal translation means co-worker or colleague and needs a qualifying adjective to distinguish between staff -- "hauptamliche Mitarbeiter" -- and volunteers -- "ehrenamtliche Mitarbeiter." Sometimes this distinction is de-emphasized by using the general term "Mitarbeiter" even when the reference is primarily to volunteers: The German AFS, for example, issues a "Mitarbeiter-Rundbrief" (newsletter) and organizes an annual nationwide "Mitarbeiterkonferenz." Although both institutions are directed at volunteers, this is not specified, possibly to emphasize the fact that volunteers as well as paid staff work for the common cause of AFS.

From talking to a number of people in preparation for this discussion I gathered that the images invoked by the word "Ehrenamtliche" almost exclusively point to older people who are well established in their lifestyles and communities, somewhat well-to-do, who want to contribute to the common good. They are seen as idealistic types, mostly women, looking for meaningful occupations or pastimes. Their field of activities in Germany range from the very popular sports clubs and other "Vereine" devoted to particular interests or hobbies, to political parties, church groups, and the whole realm of welfare organizations. Interestingly enough, the more recent movement of social action groups and citizens' initiatives was not mentioned as a field where "Ehrenamtliche" are involved, although the people to whom I talked readily agreed that these kinds of activities do indeed meet the criteria of volunteer work, but were not called to mind by the term "Ehrenamtliche." That term seems to be closely associated with the more conventional ways of working for the common good; not so much for a particular cause, but for a particular organization. Formal structures and procedures are important here, as opposed to the newer social action movement, which tends to de-emphasize organizational matters in favor of direct activities for a specific cause or issue.

Desmond Walsh (Australia): Do you have any words to describe people who work in that field?

Uli Zeutschel (Germany): Well, there doesn't seem to be any single word; sometimes the term "Aktivist" is used, but that has become almost a caricature, as it evokes images of activists from the generation of '68. There is another aspect to volunteer work in this field: the whole realm of people trying to get into paid positions in the state financed or subsidized sector of health, education, and

welfare services. A common strategy is to start out with an unpaid practicum in an established organization with the hope of eventually securing a job there. Another way is to start a new not-for-profit organization in the hope of securing sufficient state funds to create paid positions for the initiative members. These cases would also count as work with little or no remuneration out of a strong feeling of commitment to a cause or organization. To me, that appears as a whole new field of volunteer or semi-volunteer involvement that is not captured by the term "Ehrenamtliche."

Chieko Nabetani (Japan): In Japan, we use "borantia" as a transferred-from-English, Japanization of "volunteer." In Japan we have three different alphabets, one of which is solely for words transferred from foreign languages. "Borantia" is written in this alphabet. We try to adjust the word to the Japanese language. So it's a new word. But even if an original Japanese word doesn't exist, does this mean that the concept or the feeling doesn't exist? That is a big question.

"Borantia" does not refer to the person who volunteers. We would always say, "the person who is doing the volunteer-activity." Because of that I think maybe the word "borantia" means something slightly different to the Japanese people than what "volunteer" means for the English-speaking people.

In my opinion, Japanese nature can be characterized by diligence, cooperation, and hospitality, which may be closely related to volunteering in the American context. There is also another part of the Japanese culture best characterized by the phrase: "the nail that sticks up is hammered down." Someone who stands out by leading something is easily "hammered down." In a homogenous country like Japan, people intend to be similar to everyone else. This kind of tradition discourages people from being willing to take the lead. However, now the grassroots movement is rapidly increasing and people are becoming familiar with the word "borantia."

Desmond Walsh (Australia): It seems that in Japan there is a connotation of "leading" in the word "volunteer." I can only speak of Australian English really, but the volunteer in my country is thought of as someone who is reluctant to lead, although willing to participate without pay.

Chieko Nabetani (Japan): I think the majority of the people in Japan take a passive role, too. But if you volunteer, it's a little bit different because most people work for profit. So the people who do something not for profit but as a social service are showing their tendency toward strong emotions. Deep inside themselves is a strong emotional motivation. That is what I mean by "sticking out," not necessarily leading.

Kelly Thompson (Canada): Does that mean they lose face among other Japanese?

Chieko Nabetani (Japan): They would not necessarily lose face but if you show strong emotion in some way, you would be more obvious, not identical to the others. This may be good or bad.

Uli Zeutschel (Germany): This could be the reason why there is no single noun in the Japanese language for "volunteer." Using a single, defininte label to refer to a volunteer would identify that person even more strongly and in an all-encompassing way as standing out, while the description, "person who does volunteer-activity," sounds much more specific and transient. It doesn't refer to the person as one separate entity, and it emphasizes the temporary nature of his or her activity. The person is active as a volunteer now, but will do something else later.

Donna Freeman (United States): In the U.S., volunteerism is as stratified as the society is. We have a stratum of community leaders who volunteer for leadership positions in various organizations. Social change volunteers are also leading and forging the way for change. So in the U.S. it is probably different than it is in Australia because we do have volunteers who definitely are labeled as leaders.

Kelly Thompson (Canada): In Canada, too.

Desmond Walsh (Australia): I do believe "volunteerism" is a more clearly identifiable concept in the United States than it is in my country. I think there is an acculturation or socialization that goes on in the United States in terms of being a volunteer. It's important in society to be a volunteer if you are going to be seen as a good member of the society; that doesn't happen in my country the same way.

Donna Freeman (United States): Many people relate their volunteer experience to service. There is a language of service in volunteering. People talk about citizenship, about giving back to society for what they have obtained. There is a certain group of volunteers that speak a lot about service. It is a value very closely tied with citizenship.

Ana Maria Sousa (Spain): "Voluntario" is the name in Spanish for the person who is a volunteer in some way, but we have two other related words and they are "voluntarismo" and "voluntariado." "Voluntarismo" is, I think, the same as "volunteerism" in English. It is the action. "Voluntariado" refers to the people who volunteer, but all of them, not just an individual person.

Barry Chevannes (Jamaica): The volunteer cadre?

Ana Maria Sousa (Spain): Yes, that's "voluntariado." I don't think that there is a tradition of volunteerism in Spain. Although people volunteer for the Red Cross, it is not very common to volunteer for something like AFS. If you ask somebody about volunteerism, apart from those already connected with an organization, they won't know anything about it. Most of the people who volunteer for this kind of organization are young people and students because once you get a job, you don't volunteer. It is just a first step to gain experience -- maybe to get a job as well. By the time a person marries or gets a job or something they leave their volunteer activities. But I think now there are more volunteers than before because there are a lot of unemployed people. I think there is very important work to do in Spain to organize people and inform them of what volunteering is and what they can do as volunteers, because I think they just don't know. So I imagine that there are very few people who volunteer for AFS and similar organizations. Even those who do volunteer don't seem to take the responsibility very seriously. When they can, they may do something to help. Maybe there will be a leader -- one of them who works more and organizes everything -- and the other fellow who will follow him, but if there isn't that leader, there won't be any organization. If one person decides to call the others and make a meeting, then there will be a meeting. If no one decides to do this, nothing will be done. That's what I've seen in Spain.

Ron Rivera (Ecuador): I'm glad Chieko mentioned that the word "volunteer" did not originally belong to the Japanese language. It didn't exist in Latin America either until the Spanish brought it. For example, among the Indian populations in Bolivia, which is sixty percent Indian, and Ecuador, which is forty percent Indian, the word doesn't exist. The word that they use is not even a word for an individual. They say "minga" meaning the act of doing something together. So everything is constructed, roads are built, and so forth, for free using volunteers but they never say "volunteers." You are either a participant in "minga" or you're not, but if you are part of the community you have to be part of the "minga." "Voluntario" often refers to foreign volunteers. If you say "voluntario" in Honduras, they automatically think of Peace Corps. Why? Because that's been the strongest volunteer institution. Even today I think they have 450 Peace Corps volunteers in that country. And it's a very small country.

In Ecuador the youth and the middle class -- those affected by AFS, the Experiment, the Red-Cross, or any other European external agencies -- have acquired the name, "voluntario." But it's not as popular as one might think; they'd much rather use "compañero." They'd much rather break the stereotype of the volunteer who works for nothing. Because to work for nothing -- well, that's really stupid. So they say "compañero." Compañero is someone you break bread with. It could also be that your teacher is your compañero, or your boy friend or girl friend is your compañero, your husband or wife could be your

compañero, the messenger is a compañero, the boss of the agency, and everybody is a compañero . . . unless you don't like him. Then you'd use his name. In Ecuador the youth would rather say "you're my compañero" and not say you're a volunteer.

Ana Maria Sousa (Spain): In Spain, some people never call themselves volunteers when they work without pay, especially if they do not work for an organization. They are just doing something that interests them and they don't bother being called volunteers.

Ron Rivera (Ecuador): Even the Red Cross volunteers have taken the name "compañero" instead of "voluntario." Since "voluntario" is in the dictionary, people know what it means. But people will say: "The compañeros will come to a meeting this month." It's hard to say who is getting paid or what is their level. It's all the same when you use that term. In Ecuador generally, the youth prefer to say "compañero" rather than "voluntario." The national director at the AFS office uses the term "volunteers" but, like I said, it's middle-class students that have acquired the word. But when they get to a certain level they themselves stop using it. Even if you talk to a AFS volunteer, they say "los compañeros" instead of "los voluntarios" but while in the office use "volunteer."

Barry Chevannes (Jamaica): In Jamaica we don't have a name for one who does voluntary work. Nevertheless, the country has a rich tradition of such work, including the Church, the political party, citizens' associations, mutual benefit associations, specialist organizations, and so forth. As matter of fact, there is a body that has united the main voluntary organizations in the country: the Council of Voluntary Social Services (CVSS). The CVSS is nearly 50 years old. Yet the people who give their services free are not called volunteers.

Among the middle class groups, the volunteer used to be called a social worker, until social work has become professional. But many people have received national honors for "social," not voluntary work. Volunteer work at this level, I think, is associated with women whose standard of living allows them the time to be free to involve themselves thus.

Among the working masses, voluntary work tradition is equally rich and deeply historical. Volunteer work was an institutionalized activity in peasant life around labor -- for example, lend-a-day and morning sport -- and around savings -- such as "esusu" in the Eastern Caribbean, "partner" in Jamaica. People do things freely, out of a sense of what is right, "decent," or in the interest of the community.

Particularly among the youths the volunteer spirit is high. The youths were the backbone of the Community Councils of the 1970s and, obviously, of the youth clubs. A peculiarity of these latter is the fact that their work is geared not only to sports and youths, but also

to activities involving the interest of the community at large. Such youths as are active in this way are not called volunteers. Recently, a program of peer counselling has been instituted by the Ministry of Youth and Community Development. These people carry out intensive counselling. But notwithstanding the fact that they are officially designated "volunteer counselors," there is no concept that "I am a volunteer." What one finds is that many of them feel that they are constrained by the fact that they don't have enough money to become more effective counselors, you see. Economic factors tend to limit the extent -- and willingness, even -- of carrying out those types of volunteer activities. This is reported mainly in the cities.

Jeanine Deen (United States*): When I was starting to think about it, I also couldn't really get a clear concept at all about what volunteerism is in Holland. We have also two words and both are basically words for the activities and not for the persons.

The first word is "vrijwilligerswerk," which is like the same word in German, "freiwilliger." It's the work that you do out of free will. And the second concept is maybe a little bit more related to giving money to charity activities. It is "liefdadigheid" composed of "liefde" being from love and "daad" means to do something, so its the act you do out of love. "Liefdadigheid" has a typical charity connotation for me which is based on our Calvinists' religion, of helping people who are in worse shape than you are -- sick people, people who have less money, whatever. It refers to real community service work that has become in this day a very negatively loaded concept in the sense that if you think of people as needing your help, that makes them dependent on you and not responsible for their own lives. It's just giving to feel good yourself rather than giving for the other people.

As Donna was saying, volunteer jobs reflect the real social stratification of the community. There are voluntary jobs on the level of "leading man of the community" -- some honorary posts, for example. I don't think they would use the word "vrijwilliger" for that type of social work. Another type of volunteer work is what housewives do. About 50% of the women in Holland are still housewives. Among all the European countries, Holland is the one in which the least amount of women work. So there are large numbers of women who can do volunteer work because the level of living is quite high. It's possible for families to live from one job only. So the woman are free and do "vrijwilligerswerk" in their own lives. As I'm thinking about it, I don't think we would ever use the word "vrijwilliger" for a woman that is doing that type if work, though. Rather we'd talk about a specific role she has. So she might be a "senior-citizen helper" or a "reading mother" -- that's a term used in schools

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* Jeanine Deen is a native of the Netherlands.

for those who help the little groups of children learning to read. They are called "reading mothers," never "vrijwillinger."

When I think of the word "vrijwilliger" I first think of young people who are very strongly emotionally motivated to work for social change, such as political or environmental work, or any kind of work that supports changing society. The problem with the concept of "vrijwilliger" in Dutch is that we don't have a very clear distinction between people who are paid and non-paid. This is especially true now when about 10% or more from our society, among those who are able to work, is unemployed -- and not counting the housewives. It means that there are many, many people who are paid by the government and can't get a paid job, so they do volunteer work. A tendency in our society is very much toward making more and more work, which otherwise would have been subsidized by the government, into non-paid jobs. So there are many people who actually end up doing volunteer work while receiving social security. But there is still a sense that if you're paid, you're better. It's a better job if it's a paid job. The fact is that we apparently don't want to subsidize a lot social work that has to be done in society.

We also don't need very many paid workers. In Holland a lot of work is getting automated and we need fewer people to do the same amount of work. A lot of people want part-time work because, especially with higher education, one can afford to live on 20 hours' wages a week and still make enough money. The tax system presses the salaries down, but the social security is very good. Social security in Holland is generally about $1,000 a month. It is possible to live on that amount without serious problems. But these people do work just out of a sense of wanting to be helpful, or because of Calvinist mentality, or to achieve social change.

Kelly Thompson (Canada): What scares me as I listen to different people talking is this trend of less money going into social services and of high youth unemployment which seems to be having a marked effect on volunteerism in our respective countries. And this concerns me. Volunteerism in Canada in certain sectors has come to be expected if you want either to get a job or an advance. "Volunteer activities" is one of the categories on a standard resumé. If you plan to work with service-oriented organizations, you'd better have some entries. If you don't volunteer, you are not going to have the necessary networks anyway. Even if you are working full time, you are also putting in hours of volunteer work. Thus, it's not like in Holland where you might do volunteer work to replace "real" work; you are doing full-time work PLUS. What I see is a lot of over-extended people in volunteer activities, and an over-preponderance of women, who seem to have to prove themselves more than men in our culture. This may be the North American tendency to succeed at any cost -- I'm not sure. Even ten years ago, volunteerism seemed to be viewed more altruistically; now it has become an almost essential component of

professional development as opposed to personal development. Certainly this is true in the groups I volunteer for, which include the "Y" and the Canadian Peace Corps and some other community groups. The volunteers are in their early twenties to late thirties and have lots of energy, so a kind of yuppie work ethic prevails in our meetings. Some of these people seem to be compensating for a lack of satisfaction in their paid work. There are power struggles between volunteers in these groups. If you're not in a position of power in your paid work, then you can volunteer and work up into a position that is well-esteemed by the community. It's like the Jamaican middle-class idea of getting recognition through your volunteer work.

Barry Chevannes (Jamaica): Do they have the concept of volunteers?

Kelly Thompson (Canada): Very much so. However it is viewed a little disdainfully by certain members of the private sector who believe you should be working sixteen hours a day already. Thus, if you are doing volunteer work, you're either not working hard enough at your "real job" or you're wasting time that could be put to use more profitably. Certainly my family, who are in the private sector or are self-employed, make fun of my volunteer work. It is viewed by different segments of the society in different ways.

Donna Freeman (United States): For the past two years I have been doing a qualitative research project on volunteerism. I spent months in a corporation looking at corporate volunteerism in which people working full-time also get very, very involved volunteering. I found out that, just as the corporation is stratified, so are the volunteer efforts of the people within the organization. There is the Chief Executive Officer and his cabinet who are on the Boards of Directors of various organizations. But then there is the person in the mail-room who works in a soup kitchen. You don't really have a corporate president working in a soup kitchen.

People describe the values that they associate with volunteerism with a language of service, which is closely linked to citizenship. There is another language of commitment. People talk of commitment to the organization, commitment to causes, and commitment to visions and images of the future. And when there is that commitment, there are the people working for social-change who really have a vision of the future that can be different. "We are going change things." There are other people who talk of making a contribution and actually doing something meaningful in their community. There is another language of involvement, people who just need to be involved in order to live in a community. They need to have that interaction.

When I was at the Red Cross, they were concerned because the minority community had never really supported them by volunteering. I interviewed minorities who were also volunteers. They told me that in the minority communities there is a very, very strong interpersonal net-

work that fulfills a lot of the needs so they don't really think much about volunteering outside of this personal network. It doesn't enter their consciousness. In the black communities here in the United States, the sororities and fraternities that have developed over the past twenty-thirty years have become really, really strong. They are heavily involved in community service and link black people throughout the country. These groups are becoming stronger and stronger and stronger. This is a way for black people to volunteer, to become involved, and to help each other.

On the radio the other day I heard about a study of people who have won millions of dollars in state lotteries. What do these people do when they win all this money? Right away they quit their jobs, buy a new car, and volunteer. They start volunteering. They are all doing the same thing. They quit their jobs, they buy a new car, and they volunteer. It's really funny.

In terms of an ethos and values about helping each other, the U.S. has the historical tradition of barn raisings, in which neighbors would work together to build a barn for one family, or dig a ditch, or build a school house that was needed in the community.

It was interesting to talk about a "yuppie" syndrome in volunteering, yet when I spoke to the Director of the Red Cross he said to me, "I have a real fear that there are these young, highly educated business people out there working, and they really value their leisure time. They are not volunteering anymore, because they like their own life, they like their sailboats, and they like their free time to themselves. All I see is gray hair when I go out to my service organizations. I don't see young people volunteering any more."

I have a definition of "volunteer" that is a bit narrow because of the study that I was doing: "A volunteer is one who chooses to give of oneself in a deliberate spirit of service, in response to one or more perceived social needs, within an organizational context." The reason it must be within an organizational context is because there are too many ad hoc examples of volunteering or those things that are done because of your ethics, that could be considered. Why does someone give up their seat on the bus? Why does someone help someone else across the street? Then you start getting really overwhelmed, so we needed to put it in an organizational context.

Desmond Walsh (Australia): I have to speak about the difference, as everybody has, between the words and the activities and the people. Culturally in Australia there are differences between the "old" Anglo-Celtic Australians, ethnic minorities, and Aboriginal people, because each has its own approach to this.

One of the influences I perceive in the traditional Anglo-Celtic society is the continuation, even now, of the mentality of the convict

days and although not everybody who came to Australia in those times was a convict, there were a lot of convicts among the early white people in Australia, and they got beaten even when they worked. So they were not really interested in volunteering for anything. In fact, for a long time in Australia anyone who volunteered had to be very subtle about how they did it, because it looked as if, to use our language, you were a "crawler," you were "sucking up to the bosses," and our other more vulgar expressions to indicate that you were a sycophant. So if you volunteered for something, you did it in a way that didn't appear to be volunteering.

Now that went side by side with people in a country with an environment that was alien to them: everything was the reverse of the Northern Hemisphere. Things didn't grow when they were supposed to grow, the animals were strange, and the land was strange. People had to work together in a particular way and there had to be a kind of stoic community solidarity against floods, fires and so on. So, for instance, it is normal even today in country areas -- only thirty percent of the Australians live outside the cities -- that volunteer bush fire brigades are absolutely crucial for the survival of country communities. People give their lives, literally, in fighting fires, not just surrounding their own houses or townships, but houses and towns miles away.

Again through the military experience that was very strong in Australian history, the message was, don't volunteer. It was part of the language: "don't volunteer" meaning don't be a mug, don't be a sucker, a fool. So if you did something in a voluntary way, you were "doing it for a mate." It was rationalized as: my mate asked me to do it; I got talked into it; I had too many drinks in the pub and I agreed to do it. This was an excuse for volunteering, as if to say, "It really wasn't my fault, so I can't be accused of being a crawler." There's a sense of not wanting to stand out or be different. We have in Australia what we call a "tall poppy" syndrome because people who get to a certain point get chopped down. We must be half Japanese! As soon as you get a certain amount above your peers the knives come out and faults are found. So I guess that's another aspect: volunteering has that connotation of being a bit better than other people.

And the working classes of course don't have time to "volunteer." So if you say that you are a volunteer and if you are male, you obviously don't belong in the working class. So it has been, I believe, that the term "to volunteer" has been used largely to refer to an upper-middle class, rich people's pastime. I think that kind of connotation continues for people who have English as a first language.

Among the ethnic communities, because they're more recent migrants, because they've had to help one another, people are always volunteering for something. And among Aboriginal people, what might be called "community service" in an English-speaking culture, is life. To talk

to Aboriginal people about doing community service is to talk about what they do all the time, so you don't talk about volunteering.

Another connotation of "volunteering" in Australia is that if you volunteer, you are doing someone out of a job. The implication is: if this job is worth doing, somebody should pay for it.

Feminism has also had a strong negative affect, I think, on people's willingness to volunteer, or to give their service free of charge, because women have been traditionally the greatest bunch of volunteers in Australia. The "Ladies Auxiliary" has been a fundamental part of every organization that existed over past decades. The Ladies' Auxiliary were woman who did things free of charge to keep organizations functioning. It was normal at any public function for someone to say, "and I'd like to thank the Ladies' Auxiliary" because they'd put on the food, they'd organized the whole thing. Now a lot of women have said: that's enough, we are not going to be exploited any more, so if this thing needs to be done, get the men to volunteer. That has thrown some organizations into confusion. For the better, I believe. It's a process of development.

To sum up: The word "volunteerism" is really not known except among a few specialists, in AFS, and that sort of organization -- especially organizations that have links with North American culture. And the word "volunteer" has a connotation of "ladies who don't have much to do with their time so they do voluntary work or play tennis." And yet, there is a huge amount of volunteer work that has always gone on in Australia, from Meals-on-Wheels for the housebound elderly, to the Red-Cross, the Lions and Rotary clubs, the VIEW and Zonta clubs for women -- all those clubs that exist to do voluntary work -- and the St. Vincent de Paul Society and other church groups and so on. There is the Returned Servicemen's League which helps families of veterans, and Legacy, which helps the war widows and orphans, and other organizations like the bush fire brigade. The surf lifesaving movement started in Australia, and that is all voluntary work -- men and women patrolling the beaches where people are swimming every weekend, saving lives at the risk of ones own life.

Ron Rivera (Ecuador): I wanted to include something else. In Latin America there is the motive of "merito," or merit. So a person might volunteer to work for merit, but wouldn't use the word volunteer. You don't do something for nothing, but merit may be considered something very valuable. An example that might pertain to AFS would be the person who volunteers before being selected as an exchange student to try to "merit" a placement on AFS. If you were looking for a government job -- in fact, it's even part of the government structure -- you may work for free for the government. You may work as a volunteer for the government for merit. Maybe someday, and it could be six years, if there is a position that's open, you'd maybe considered for the position. It's generally believed such things do help.

Kelly Thompson (Canada): So that means that they train or recruit volunteers with specific skills. And they can only do that because they have a large unemployed base. That's starting to happen in Canada too.

Chieko Nabetani (Japan): I think it's very similar to the word "intern" isn't it? We have that sometimes in Japan.

Jeanine Deen (United States): That's what the situation is in Holland at the moment too. Many people try to get a paid position. Because it's so hard for people -- especially well educated people -- to get a job, they actually start to work somewhere unpaid, hoping that they later can get a paid job if anything comes up.

Desmond Walsh (Australia): But that's a curious cultural thing in Australia. You wouldn't ask someone who is unemployed, even if he or she is on social security, to do something voluntary. You'd be too embarrassed.

Ron Rivera (Ecuador): But how do you volunteer for sports? How do they do it in Australia? Wouldn't you ask somebody to join your team to play? Or carry water?

Neal Grove (AFS/CSIL): But that person would have been asked, and that's all right according to what you've said, right? And you say, Oh, well, they put a lot of pressure on me.

Desmond Walsh (Australia): Yes, you'd let it be known that you would like to be asked to join. You'd say: "What do you do to get into this organization?" Then when somebody gets the hint and asks, "Would you like to be in it?" you might say "Oh well, I'm very busy. I really don't know if I can afford the time." Then you're invited to "Just come along to one meeting and watch."

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